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**RESPECT: a personal development programme for
young people at risk of social exclusion**

Option Two Impact Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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September 2008

Executive Summary

Background

The RESPECT programme is governed by a partnership of organisations which work within the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service area of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. The programme brings together a number of elements of the Fire and Rescue Service's earlier work with youth engagement in a concerted attempt to tackle wider challenges pertinent to the fire services, whilst working in partnership with other agencies.

RESPECT, which has been funded for three years from the Government's *Invest to Save* initiative, is a targeted intervention for young people who are aged 11 to 16 years and who are disaffected and/or displaying anti-social behaviour. The programme aims to re-motivate young people who may be temporarily or permanently excluded from school, be in danger of exclusion, have a high level of unauthorised absence, be involved in anti-social behaviour and/or be known to the Youth Offending Teams.

The RESPECT programme comprises a number of different elements. These are Option One led by fire service personnel; Option Two led by the Youth Federation; detached youth work, *On the Streets*, led by Halton Youth Service; and a school holiday project.

A three year evaluation was built into the RESPECT bid in order that the individual, community and societal benefits of the programme could be quantified and evidenced. This report is part of the impact evaluation. Its focus is to explore and evidence the short and medium term impact of the Option Two courses upon the young people who were allocated places between May 2007 and April 2008.

Study design and methods

The study has adopted a pluralistic approach to the evaluation of the impact of Option Two of the RESPECT programme. This has enabled the evaluators to bring together the perspectives of a range of 'stakeholders' – the young people themselves, the staff who have run the programme and referrers and school contacts. Primary and secondary data collection methods have been employed; data sources included referral forms, attendance registers, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, self-completion questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews, and reviews completed by the young people and RESPECT staff.

This report has placed the impact of the RESPECT programme at the individual level within the theoretical construct of risk and protective factors and the development of resilience. A young person's involvement with the initiative can be viewed as a potential 'turning point', providing an opportunity for 'positive chain reactions' through the reduction of risk factors, an increase in protective factors and the development of resilience.

Key findings

The Option Two course of the RESPECT programme has had a greater impact on some young people than on others. Where the course did have an impact, it was most frequently in relation to the increased ability of the young people to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour and consider the way that these impacted on other people. Some young people were also able to employ techniques they had learnt to change their behaviour.

The important factors about the Option Two course that appeared to maximise the chances of this happening for the participants could be understood in terms of the following:

- the young people referred – young people who have needs that can be addressed by Option Two of the RESPECT programme;
- the timing of the referral – the young person being ready to learn;
- one-to-one sessions – engaging the young person before the course and providing the opportunity to identify and discuss personal targets whilst they are attending;
- the role of the youth workers – proving a positive role model of a non-exploitative and supportive relationship with an adult;
- the nature of the activities – structured, challenging and fun activities that encourage involvement and are built around teamwork;
- a range of activities – providing opportunities for the young person to reflect on their own behaviour and attitudes;
- the ambience – activities taking place in a calm and reassuring atmosphere;
- tasks being carried out with support, encouragement and praise – a 'can-do' mentality that emphasises the satisfaction and importance of achieving goals and recognising when it happens;

- the acquisition of knowledge and discussion of coping techniques – facilitating their application to different settings such as school, home and in their leisure time;
- with additional support – ideally on and outside the programme from significant adults who can assist in the transfer of learning.

Where Option Two appears to have had less of an impact, the entrenched difficulties facing participants and peer group pressure may have been important. However, the differential impact appears to have been a consequence, at least in part, of the young people not engaging sufficiently with the learning process facilitated through the programme of activities and tasks, as well as the limited extent to which they were able to transfer their learning to other situations. If the impact of Option Two is to be maximised, it would be beneficial to clarify the objectives of the activities – for all stakeholders – and explore the potential for the provision of one-to-one support, both within and beyond the programme, to facilitate the transfer of learning.

Conclusions

This evaluation presents a picture of the short and medium term impact of the Option Two courses for the young people who were allocated places between May 2007 and April 2008: the ongoing impact of the RESPECT programme can only be measured in the months and years ahead.

The evaluation highlighted a number of issues for the operation of the RESPECT programme and its evaluation. Operational issues identified as requiring further consideration are:

- recognition of the importance of the referral process in order to ensure that appropriate and timely referrals are made;
- the need to continue to invest in pre-course engagement;
- the need to clarify the learning objectives of the activities and tasks and ensure that they are systematically and consistently conveyed throughout the learning process;
- the need to consider how all of the young people who participate in the programme can be supported during and after the course to maximise their learning.

The report raised a number of important issues for the evaluation of the RESPECT programme. These included the value of both the qualitative and quantitative data in

measuring impact, and the need to ensure that complete and comprehensive data are collected over the lifetime of the programme, data which also reflect the views and experiences of all stakeholders.

Copies of the full report can be obtained from the Centre for Public Health Research at a cost of £10.00 per report. Please email your requirements to: cphr@chester.ac.uk